

Bringing the artisanal cocktail home

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Friday, October 3, 2008

tt Beattie may no longer be bartending at Cyrus, the Healdsburg restaurant where he helped inspire the term "bar chef" with his devotion to high-quality ingredients and careful attention to technique and tradition. But as an extreme example of the local, seasonal cooking movement, he and his new book, "Artisan Cocktails: Drinks Inspired by the Seasons from the Bar at Cyrus" (Ten Speed Press, \$24.95), are a hot ticket.

After he presented his book and its recipes at the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena, a food and beverage manager for Disney resorts asked Beattie about the nightly liquor sales at the bar at Cyrus. Beattie replied with a modest four-digit number, then asked the exec about his food and beverage sales.

"It was 3.2 last year," he answered.

"Million?" asked Beattie.

"Billion," countered the Disney guy.

Beattie's creations, in which the subrecipes have recipes and garnishes include dehydrated lotus root, wouldn't seem to translate on a Disneyesque scale. But the Healdsburg bartender is convinced that anyone, even mammoth companies, could adopt the methods and ideas he sets forth in his new book.

"It's doable, it's totally doable," says Beattie, 33. "I hope people realize that the result is a really an exceptional cocktail."

Those who have visited Cyrus might recognize drinks in the book, which Beattie perfected during his three years as bar manager. Beattie left the restaurant this spring after thoroughly training two other bartenders. He's now promoting his book (see scottbeattiecocktails.com for upcoming book signings) and consulting and cocktail catering.

Though Cyrus also has a serious classic cocktail list, Beattie is best known for his use of culinary ingredients in seasonally changing cocktails. Crediting chef-owner Douglas Keane and owner Nick Peyton for providing him the time, budget and counter space to get things just right, Beattie built up the repertoire of fanciful garnishes, homemade bitters, fresh fruit syrups and liqueurs that make his cocktails so distinctive.

For many, recipes like the Huck Yu, which calls for vodka, Prosecco, homemade huckleberry syrup, verjuice, yuzu juice and limoncello (with its own subrecipe) might send this book to "The French Laundry Cookbook" pile. But the book's photos and recipes do inspire one to run out to the farmers' market for borage flowers or to invest in better cocktail equipment.

Though definitely geared toward those who are serious about mixology, the book has the potential to motivate a new audience - those who love cooking but don't put much effort into making cocktails.

"I truly believe that people who are willing to spend an hour or two hours or more preparing a dinner can spend a little longer than usual to make great drinks," said Beattie.

Huck Yu

Makes 1 cocktail

The name comes from a combination of huckleberries and yuzu, a sour Japanese citrus juice available in Japanese markets. Wild huckleberries grow prodigiously in the forest on the Sonoma coast in the late summer and are available at specialty purveyors like Far West Fungi at the Ferry Building in San Francisco. You can also order them (shipped frozen) from online purveyors like Wild Harvest (nwwildfoods.com/index.cfm).

The huckleberry syrup

1/2 pound fresh or frozen huckleberries

1/4 cup sugar

1/4 cup white verjuice

The cocktail

1 ounce vodka

1/2 ounce limoncello

1 ounce white verjuice (see Note)

1/4 ounce yuzu juice

1/4 ounce huckleberry syrup

2 ounces Prosecco or Cava

For the huckleberry syrup: Combine the huckleberries, sugar and verjuice in a stainless steel saucepan over high heat. Bring the mixture to a boil, stirring frequently, then reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes, until the berry skins have burst and the liquid is slightly reduced.

Remove from the heat and press through a fine-mesh strainer or chinois into a container. Allow the syrup to cool to at least room temperature before using. (The syrup recipe yields 1 cup; leftovers will keep for up to 2 weeks refrigerated in an airtight container and are delicious on toast or pancakes.)

For the cocktail: Combine the vodka, limoncello, juices and syrup in a mixing glass and stir well. Add enough ice to fill the mixing glass, cover and shake well. Strain into a Champagne flute and add the sparkling wine.

Note: Verjuice, or verjus, is the juice of unripe wine grapes. Scott Beattie likes the brands Terra Sonoma and Fusion from Napa Valley.

Bella Ruffina

Makes 1 cocktail

The deep crimson color of this cocktail makes it a festive number for holiday parties. Braquetto d'Aqui is a low-alcohol sparkling red wine from Italy. Carpano Antica is a full-flavored sweet vermouth that complements the herbaceous qualities in the sparkling wine; you could use Punt e Mes, Cocchi Barolo Chinato or another high-quality sweet Italian vermouth.

2 ounces Braquetto d'Aqui

1 ounce Carpano Antica vermouth

1 dash orange bitters

1 Amarena cherry, for garnish (see Note)

Instructions: Combine the sparkling wine, vermouth and bitters in a Champagne flute and stir gently. Drop the cherry in the bottom of the glass and serve.

Note: Amarena cherries are available at Williams-Sonoma and the Pasta Shop in Berkeley and Oakland.

When Beattie started at Cyrus he spent a lot of time developing ingredient sources, from planting Rangpur lime and yuzu trees in his backyard to talking local farmers into growing obscure types of herbs for him.

"The process of getting ingredients is the most enjoyable part, like when I go out and pick wild huckleberries or wild blackberries, or go to Love Farms (in Healdsburg) and pick the herbs," says Beattie, whose flavors are often inspired by the ethnic foods he ate while growing up in San Francisco.

The book profiles farmers and distillers, but the recipes don't always clarify what certain esoteric ingredients are, or where to find them. Beattie says that's because so much can be found online, which is true of prepared ingredients like essential oils. It's harder when it comes to things like fresh hearts of palm, which are pretty much available only to restaurant chefs.

But Beattie does mention potential substitutes (canned hearts of palm are OK) and suggests asking around at farmers' markets for herbs. He also says that the flavor combinations are not hard and fast. "Ultimately this book is not a lot of rules, but suggestions," he says.

The sidebars will help novices learn how to create their own flavored simple syrups, among other building blocks to excellent cocktails, such as pristine ice cubes.

Though each cocktail is designed to be made one by one, any of the drinks that are served up can be scaled up for a party. Make all the components ahead, line them up on the bar, then shake two drinks at a time with ice so they are properly diluted, he suggests.

Beattie sees the public perception of cocktails turning around. Though a lot of his customers started out afraid to try cocktails with spirits like Tequila and gin, citing bad experiences from their youth, many have become much more open to new spirits and even to some of the spicy ingredients he adds to Asian-inflected cocktails like the Irian Jaya, with candied lemongrass and pickled Nardello peppers.

"Once you eat well-made food that is prepared correctly it's very difficult to eat TV dinners and frozen pizzas," he says. "It's the same with cocktails. It's hard to go back to a Midori Sour once you have a great-tasting cocktail."